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RECENT BRITISH DEVELOPMENTS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING.

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GREAT BRITAIN'S LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFESSION HAS BECOME INVOLVED IN RESOLVING THE NEW DEMANDS PUT ON THE PROFESSION BY THE GREAT SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES OF THE PAST 25 YEARS. THE FIRST OF THE TWO MAIN TRENDS OF THIS REVOLUTION CONCERNS ORGANIZATION. MOST RADICAL AMONG THE CHANGES IN THIS AREA HAVE BEEN (1) THE DEVELOPMENT, IN THE NEW UNIVERSITIES, OF DEPARTMENTS OF LITERATURE RESPONSIBLE FOR TEACHING LITERATURE IN MANY LANGUAGES AND OF LANGUAGE CENTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR BOTH THE STUDY AND TEACHING OF LANGUAGES, (2) THE EXPLOSIVE GROWTH OF FLES PROGRAMS IN STATE-MAINTAINED SCHOOLS, AND (3) THE INVOLVEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL, GOVERNMENT, AND PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS IN THE INFORMATIONAL AND RESEARCH COMMITMENTS OF THE GROWING PROFESSION. THE SECOND TREND IN THE REVOLUTION RELATES TO THE INCREASED EMPHASIS ON LINGUISTICS AND THE GROWING ACCEPTANCE OF AUDIOLINGUAL METHODS, COUPLED WITH THE POSSIBLE REINFORCEMENT OF AUDIOVISUAL AIDS, IN THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGES. THIS PAPER WAS DELIVERED AT THE 16TH GEORGETOWN ROUND TABLE ON LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE TEACHING, MARCH 1965. (AB)

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RECENT BRITISH DEVELOPMENTS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Language teaching in Britain is in the throes of a revolution. Revolutions often appear to those engaged in them as unco-ordinated, complex, untidy happenings. Consequently the description of the present state of language teaching in Britain is difficult to achieve, as much because of the complexity of the events as of their untidyness. Nevertheless it may be worth attempting a personal view of what is happening at the present time.

Britain has not in the past been noted for prowess in language teaching. Our well-known attitudes of political, social and economic insularity have traditionally been matched by our views on foreign languages. "Why can't the damned foreigners learn to speak English?" was only half a joke expression; the saying that "The English can't learn languages" reflected a hope on the part of many Englishmen[1] that they would never have to. At the same time, the phrase was an excuse for the fact that on the whole we taught them pretty badly -- not worse, one should hasten to add, than most of our near European neighbours, but certainly not as well as the Dutch, the Danes and the Swedes.

Those days are over, their passing hastened by the great social and economic changes of the past twenty-five years: by a familiarity with overseas travel and by the contacts with foreigners which the Second World War produced; by the vast expansion of the mass media of communication and especially the inclusion of Britain within a European television network; by the new habit of holidaying abroad; by the widespread showing of foreign films; by the internationalisation of government and of the machinery of

(1) The use of the term English here is deliberate, not simply an unthinking alternative for British. The Welsh, the Scots and to some extent the Irish have different and more xenophilic traditions. However the trends and changes reported in this paper are taking place equally in England, Scotland and much of Wales.

economic control; by a massive expansion of foreign trade; and not least, by a rise in the general level of education, which has turned people towards a more international outlook.

It is hardly surprising that the acceptance of greater contact with foreign countries and therefore with foreign languages was followed by a rapid and drastic rise in the number of people required to operate at the points of international contact. In industry, commerce, government, science and education the same sudden need has arisen: more people are needed, with a better practical command of a wider range of languages, than ever before. These are the pressures behind the current revolution, and these are the demands that the language teaching profession must make itself capable of meeting.

In beginning to meet these demands, two main kinds of trend can be seen. The first concerns organisation; the changes now occurring have their symptoms in higher education, in the school system, and in the national and professional bodies. The second main category relates to the principles, techniques and methods that are coming into use. In both of these fields, similarities with events and solutions in America will be evident, but so also will contrasts and differences.

ORGANISATION

1. Higher Education. The pattern of foreign languages follows similar lines in most British and American universities. Given the resistance to change that universities display it is not surprising that it is in the new universities[2] that the most radical changes are taking place. The arrangements at Essex are sufficiently like those planned by York, Canterbury and

(2) British universities fall into a small number of main groups: Oxford and Cambridge (the "ancient" universities, sometimes referred to as "Oxbridge"); the Scottish universities; London, which is sui generis; the civic universities, mostly founded in the late 19th or early 20th century and sometimes referred to as the "redbrick" universities; and the "new" universities, founded since 1945 -- some of them indeed still in process of being founded.

Warwick for them to serve as an illustration of a new pattern.

Instead of separate departments of French, German, Spanish, Russian, etc., each of which teaches a degree in literature and philology, Essex has created a Department of Literature (under Prof. Donald Davie) which concerns itself with literature in many languages, and a Language Centre which contains the whole of the university's provision for the study and teaching of languages. The teaching of particular languages (at present Spanish, Russian and French: next year also Portuguese and German) to undergraduates is one of the functions of the Centre; research in linguistics and in particular languages and the development of improved teaching materials is another; a third is professional and vocational courses (such as a one-year M.A. in Applied Linguistics, for teachers of foreign languages and of English as a foreign language); and the fourth function is the provision of "external" courses in languages, for industry, or for other groups of learners over and above the full-time internal students.

The language instruction given in our Centre differs in several ways from the standard kind of university programme. In the first place, we accept students with no previous experience in a given language, which ought not to be a novelty, but is. In the second place, the aims of the language teaching are practical. Students are being taught to <u>use</u> the language, though the precise terminal skills we aim at vary from one course to another. Thirdly, a language is taught as a gateway to other disciplines rather than as an end in itself. For example, a student may be learning Russian because he is studying Russian as well as English literature; or Spanish because he is studying politics and government in Latin America; or French with a view to a research project in sociology to be carried out in France. Fourthly, the approach to the study and teaching of languages applies the findings of modern linguistics and psychology whenever they are relevant: the study of the present-day language by the use of linguistics has replaced in our curricula the study of historical forms of the language by the use of philology.

Similar patterns of foreign language teaching can be seen in several of the new universities and in some of the colleges of advanced technology

now emerging into university status. These institutions are providing a long-term solution to our shortage of people capable of using a foreign language. But there are many thousands of individuals whose education occurred at a time and in a place where the new facilities did not exist. For them the colleges of further education and local evening institutes and technical colleges supply a great many practical language courses.

2. Schools. Until very recently the teaching of foreign languages in our State-maintained schools was confined to the grammar schools, and to only a fraction of the children who attended them. In practice this meant that probably less than 25% of British children ever received instruction in any modern foreign language. What they received was often a pale reflection of the kind of course given in universities, with the study of literature representing almost the sole justification for encountering the language at all. The average standard of achievement in the language, especially the spoken language, has often been described as disastrous.

The major change in this area of education is a sudden, explosive development of foreign language teaching in the primary schools, to children between the ages of 7 and 12. In 1961 there were perhaps twenty or thirty primary school children in the whole country learning a foreign language; the current number is of the order of five thousand; the Department of Education and Science (i.e. the former Ministry of Education) estimates that by 1967 the number will reach 100,000. There seems every chance, in fact, that within five years a foreign language (which will almost always be French) will be taught to every primary school child in England and Scotland. Once this occurs, the whole shape of language teaching in the schools is bound to change.

At present the grammar schools receive only children with no knowledge of French; but when all the pupils entering grammar school already possess a grounding in spoken French the school's task is radically altered. So also is the position of other languages in the same schools; while other kinds of school, which until now have taught no foreign language, will have to think again about their curriculum. The teacher training colleges, too, have already had to begin to provide professional courses for those non-graduate

teachers who will now be teaching French.

This is a major component of our language teaching revolution, and its effects can only intensify the process of making the English almost multilingual.

Primary school language teaching began as an experiment; it quickly grew into a series of unco-ordinated wild-cat schemes; at one point the enthusiasm of teachers and parents had pushed so far ahead of the supply of adequate teachers or classroom materials that a large number of rank bad examples were in existence which were threatening the general reputability of primary school French. The way in which the situation was rescued illustrates another of the main threads of the current revolution.

The Nuffield Foundation financed in 1962 the preparation of a Report[3] on the current state of affairs. This revealed that both excellent and appalling teaching was to be found, and it also stressed the two main difficulties, which were, first, a shortage of suitable teaching courses and materials, and second, a lack of facilities for training the relevant teachers. At this juncture, largely through the initiative of Her Majesty's Staff Inspector for Modern Languages, Dr. D.C. Riddy, and the Director of the Nuffield Foundation, a joint scheme was set up between the Foundation and the Department of Education and Science. The Foundation created a team to work as a matter of urgency on the preparation of courses, tapes, visual aids, and a teacher's manual. The Department designated a range of some 200 schools in selected areas (although far more than 200 applied to be included) and began an intensive programme of in-service training for the teachers. The Department of Education decided that it was essential that French in primary schools, if it was to be done at all, should be done properly. Their initiative in setting up an official Pilot Scheme will ensure that there will be no excuse for poor teaching of French at the primary level.

(3) Report on Primary School Language Teaching in Britain. C.M. Lázaro. Nuffield Foundation Foreign Language Teaching Materials Project. 5 Lyddon Terrace, Leeds 2.

3. Other Organisations

Britain has no NDEA. It has no Center for Applied Linguistics. It has no central control of education. The result of these facts is that we lack the finance and to some extent the organisation which are necessary to carry out the collection and dissemination of knowledge about progress in language teaching and the sponsoring and co-ordination of research. Fortunately, the body of professionals known as Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (who are appointed by the Crown, and who can influence teachers only by requesting and advising them, not by requiring and controlling) have been in the forefront of progress as far as schools are concerned. In addition to them, four important bodies should be mentioned.

The first is the Nuffield Foundation, whose interest in primary school language teaching has already been touched on, but which has helped in a great many other ways. Their present annual level of expenditure on modern language teaching and linguistics is running at around a million dollars, which by British standards is an extremely large sum for educational purposes.

The second is the National Committee on Research and Development in Modern Languages, a government-appointed body with the duty of coordinating and sponsoring efforts in this field. They are at present in approximately the position of the American Modern Language Association in 1952: that is to say, they are trying to find out just what the present situation really is and what institutions are teaching which languages, to what pupils, using what materials, with what degree of success, and with what major difficulties. At the same time they are already making grants for specific research projects. It may be that this Committee will eventually provide services similar to those which make the Center for Applied Linguistics such a valuable asset in America.

The third is the British Council, specifically its Education Division and the English-Teaching Information Centre which that Division maintains. For some two or three years before modern language teaching in Britain was influenced to any extent by modern views on applied linguistics and the use of equipment, the teaching of English as a foreign language by and through

the British Council had been largely reorganised along modern lines. The British Council does not itself undertake a great deal of direct teaching of English overseas, but it supplies professional advisers, it recruits English teachers for overseas posts, and it supports courses in British universities which train teachers or teacher-trainers in this field. It is largely due to the efforts of Dr. A.H. King, Controller of the Education Division- that there now exists a policy about the professional training of teachers of English and the resources for training and sustaining them. Among these resources one must count the English-Teaching Information Centre, which plays a valuable part in collecting and disseminating professional information.

Finally under this heading we should mention the professional bodies. The British Linguistics Association, though a plant of recent growth, is flourishing and will doubtless become a major influence. An Audio-Visual Language Association is doing a useful job in coordinating experience and knowledge about language laboratory teaching and audio-visual aids. The Modern Language Association still caters largely for those school teachers (the majority) who teach conventional courses by well-tried and orthodox means, but there are signs that it may be on the brink of embracing more radical views.

Perhaps the most far-reaching new organisation is not strictly a British body at all, but a mainly European one. L'Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée was established at a meeting at Nancy in October 1964. Already national Associations of Applied Linguistics have been formed or are planned in a dozen countries, and while it is too early to predict the final outcome I suspect that l'AILA will be a most powerful influence for spreading new principles and methods in foreign language teaching.

PRINCIPLES, TECHNIQUES AND METHODS

1. Applications of Linguistics

It is hardly necessary, after the presence at Round Table Meetings in recent years of Professor Frank Palmer and Dr. Michael Halliday, to expand

upon the fact that a "British School" of linguistics has evolved within the past five years. If we take as a rough index the number of university staff employed full-time on work in linguistics, the increase is from about 15 people in 1960 to about 50 in 1965, while the number of universities with serious programmes in linguistics has risen from three to eleven. Chairs in general or applied linguistics (including Contemporary English where filled by a linguist) have been newly created since 1960 in the following universities: Bangor, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Essex, Leeds, London, Manchester, Newcastle, Reading and York.

Building partly on this surge of British thought in linguistics, partly on American theory and practice, and partly on French and other European developments, the notion of applied linguistics, especially in the field of language teaching has begun to be accepted in Britain. The leading centre, and for some years the only one, was the University of Edinburgh, whose School of Applied Linguistics under Ian Catford (now Professor of Linguistics at Michigan) was the main inspiration in this area of study.

2. Techniques and Methods

By far the most radical change has been in the acceptance of new aims in language teaching. Foreign languages are no longer available only in a "package deal" with literature and/or philology. Second only to this has been a new emphasis on practical ability in handling the language, and above all the spoken language.

Most teachers now accept that there is benefit to be gained from the use of aids and equipment, that far from damaging his pride by using recordings or equipment, the teacher may improve the effectiveness of his teaching. (This is a change in attitude whose difficulty Americans can hardly guess at.) Language laboratory techniques and audio-visual teaching are now pretty widespread in Britain[4]. However, language laboratories are

(4) I have been struck by the relatively much smaller interest in audio-visual techniques in the United States. The reason may lie in Europe's greater familiarity with the highly

generally regarded somewhat differently: the average British teacher sees a language lab as first and foremost a specially-equipped classroom, and only secondarily as a kind of "reference library". One effect of this has been to keep the usual size of laboratories down to roughly the size of an average class, rather than to build large-scale installations; another effect has been to keep the teacher located at the front of the class, with eye-contact to every student. There have been some experiments with television teaching. Both the commercial companies and the BBC have produced some excellent television programmes, while the BBC is at present conducting a promising experiment in which a radio programme is matched by simultaneous projection of film-strips by the teacher in the classroom.

The television and "radiovision" experiments, the French audio-visual courses, and indeed the entire profession of teaching English as a foreign language, lean heavily on the notion of <u>situational teaching</u>. Perhaps for the reason that they are "decontextualised" -- out of situation -- we have never accorded a major place to intensive drills and pattern practice. We do include them, of course, but not to the extent that American courses do. This idea that all language should be taught in a meaningful context is not new, but its acceptance in foreign language teaching is a rather recent trend.

It is of course difficult to keep one's teaching realistic and meaningful throughout a long course. Like American teachers, the English are at last discovering that language laboratories and other aids can take the drudgery out of language teaching and release the teacher for more productive use of his time. But there is a distinct difference in the two views of where drudgery begins. The British (and indeed, the European) teacher does not believe that drudgery is in fact necessary. He is trained to take pride in a continual search for variety, for interest, for ingenious ways of

successful audio-visual courses produced in Paris by C.R.E.D.I.F. and especially the pioneer audio-visual French course for adults, <u>Voix et Images de France</u>. Another reason may be the European preference for teaching that involves the teacher and his mistrust of a method that seems to reduce his own function.

practising language without resorting to forms of drill that might induce boredom. He does not always succeed, but the fact that he is trained to try may in part explain the teacher-centred nature of British foreign language teaching and the relative infrequency of do-it-yourself materials.

Things are happening in testing. A research team at Birmingham has just completed work on a test of attainment in English which will in principle be administered to overseas students before they leave for Britain, and which will probably become part of normal selection procedures. Testing foreign languages is less far advanced, but the example of the MLA Tests will undoubtedly affect us in the near future.

What of research in general? When set beside the formidable lists of projects financed by NDEA the British effort appears tiny. Indeed most of the existing research work is within phonetics, or descriptive linguistics, or English studies which I will not discuss. But the picture is changing. Already the Nuffield Foreign Language Teaching Materials Project is producing results. Birkbeck College, London, is setting up a major research centre with linguists, language teachers and psychologists collaborating together; the University of York has research plans; my own Language Centre at Essex has a major grant for a project on contemporary Russian; Dr. Halliday's Communication Research Centre has a number of massive schemes in hand. Within the next 18 months it should be possible to discern some important main lines of British research in this field, even though at present the effort is scattered and largely in initial stages.

The revolution is on. It has come later in Britain than it did in the United States, and it has a number of individual features, but in general it is following much the same lines. Foreign language teaching is a long way from being perfect, but it seems to be becoming much more effective.

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